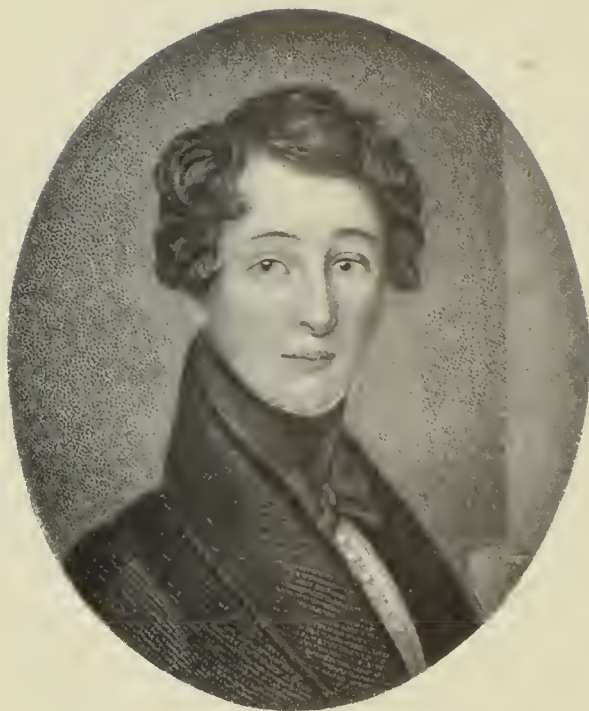




CHARLES DICKENS
SHORTHAND WRITER



CHARLES DICKENS AT THE AGE OF 18.
(From the miniature by his aunt, Mrs. Barrow.)

By permission of Mr. Frank T. Sabin.

1. 27. 1840
J. H. 1840
J. H. 1840

CHARLES DICKENS

SHORTHAND WRITER

THE 'PRENTICE DAYS OF
A MASTER CRAFTSMAN

By

WILLIAM J. CARLTON

Author of "Timothe Bright, Doctor of Phisicke :
A Memoir of the Father of Modern Shorthand "

With Twelve Illustrations

LONDON

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“ My feeling for the vocation of my youth is a faithful sympathy which is a part of myself.”—
Charles Dickens at the Annual Dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund, 20th May, 1865.

CHARLES DICKENS

SHORTHAND WRITER

INTRODUCTORY

IT is no disparagement of Forster's monumental *Life of Charles Dickens* or of those who have endeavoured to elucidate and amplify what is obscure or incomplete in its pages to say that there is one aspect of the novelist's career which has received less than adequate treatment at the hands of his biographers. Comparatively little is known of the years which he passed in the professional practice of stenography as a means of subsistence, when he toiled as a shorthand writer in the law courts, as a parliamentary stenographer in the Gallery of either House of Parliament, and as a newspaper reporter in London and the provinces. Dickens has been styled the prince of reporters, and

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the importance of this period of preparation for his life's work needs no emphasis. That it has never yet been thoroughly explored is perhaps attributable to the fact that the materials for such an investigation are, for the most part, not readily accessible, some of them indeed having only recently come to light.

Few great men of letters have had a scantier equipment of learning than Charles Dickens. Defrauded in his young days, like Elia, of "the sweet food of academic institution," his university was the reading room of the British Museum, the police and law courts, the newspaper office and the Press Gallery—not least, the streets of London. In the course of his practice as a shorthand writer he acquired that unrivalled knowledge of "everyday life and everyday people" upon which he drew to such purpose in his earliest sketches, that amazing insight into human foibles and

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frailties which revealed itself when he came to write the novels that were to ensure his lasting fame. Thanks to the invaluable training of those 'prentice days, when he left the vocation of his youth to embark definitely upon a literary career he found himself admirably equipped for the great task assigned to him. Robert Louis Stevenson might have been writing of Charles Dickens when he happily characterized another Southron as a man who had taken his degree in life.

Foremost among those who have contributed to our knowledge of Dickens' activities at this time are the indefatigable Mr. F. G. Kitton ; Mr. Charles Van Noorden, another enthusiastic Dickensian who has devoted particular attention to Dickens' reporting days ; and Mr. Charles Kent, whose little-known essay on " Charles Dickens as a Journalist " is of value chiefly in so far as it is based on the recollections of Thomas Beard. To them my acknowledgments are grate-

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fully tendered. In addition to the indispensable Forster, I have availed myself freely of the data contained in Robert Langton's *Childhood and Youth of Dickens* (1891), in Mr. W. E. A. Axon's pamphlet on *Charles Dickens and Shorthand* (1892), and in Mr. Michael Macdonagh's *The Reporters' Gallery* (1913), which includes a chapter on "Charles Dickens as a Reporter." To Mr. Alex. Tremaine Wright, of the Institute of Shorthand Writers, and, in an especial degree, to Mr. George Walpole, official shorthand writer to the Central Criminal Court, I am also indebted for many helpful suggestions.

Information gleaned from these and many other sources was embodied in a paper which I read before the International Shorthand Congress held at Lausanne in July, 1924. The friendly reception accorded to that communication encouraged me to pursue my investigations, the results of which are

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now submitted in a revised and considerably extended form to a wider circle of readers.

The portrait of Dickens which serves as a frontispiece to this volume is from a miniature on ivory painted by his aunt, Mrs. Edward Barrow, in 1830, when he was just entering on his career as a shorthand writer. It is the earliest Dickens portrait known, and is reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Frank T. Sabin, the owner of the copyright.

For permission to reproduce the facsimiles of the Consistory Court judgments taken down in shorthand and transcribed by Dickens I have to thank the Rector and Churchwardens of St. Bartholomew-the-Great, Smithfield.

GENEVA, November, 1925.

CHAPTER I

THE LAW, JOURNALISM AND MISS BEADNELL

Charles Dickens himself gave the following brief retrospect of his reporting career to his friend Wilkie Collins in 1856 :—

“ I was put in the office of a solicitor, a friend of my father’s, and didn’t much like it : and after a couple of years (as well as I can remember) applied myself with a celestial or diabolical energy to the study of such things as would qualify me to be a first-rate parliamentary reporter—at that time a calling pursued by many clever men who were young at the Bar. I made my *début* in the Gallery (at about 18, I suppose) engaged on a voluminous publication no longer in existence called

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the *Mirror of Parliament*. When the *Morning Chronicle* was purchased by Sir John Easthope and acquired a large circulation, I was engaged there, and I remained there until I had begun to publish *Pickwick*, when I found myself in a condition to relinquish that part of my labours. I left the reputation behind me of being the best and most rapid reporter ever known, and could do anything in that way under any sort of circumstances, and often did. (I daresay I am, at this present writing, the best shorthand writer in the world.)''¹

Penned in a more or less jocular vein, this confident self-appraisement was nevertheless, as we shall see, no idle boast.

To his parents' acquaintance with Mr. Edward Blackmore, junior partner in the firm of Ellis & Blackmore, solicitors, Gray's Inn, Dickens owed what was probably his first employment after leaving

¹ *Letters of Charles Dickens*, 2nd ed., 1880, vol. i, p. 438.

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Wellington House Academy towards the close of 1826 or early in 1827. Blackmore lived in a boarding house at 16, Berners Street, kept by Mr. and Mrs. Charlton. The latter was an aunt of Dickens' mother. Mrs. Dickens and her children were frequent visitors there, and the demeanour of the eldest boy impressed the solicitor so favourably that he agreed to take him as a clerk. Dickens entered the office of the firm, No. 1, Holborn Court, Gray's Inn, as a lad of fifteen in May, 1827, and remained there just eighteen months. He has himself classified the various grades of lawyers' clerks in the order of their importance, from "the articulated clerk, who has paid a premium, and is an attorney in perspective, who runs a tailor's bill, receives invitations to parties, knows a family in Gower Street, and another in Tavistock Square: who goes out of town every Long Vacation to see his father, who keeps live horses innumerable; and who

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is, in short, the very aristocrat of clerks," down to "the office lads in their first surtouts, who feel a befitting contempt for boys at day-schools: club, as they go home at night, for saveloys and porter: and think there's nothing like 'life.' "

Dickens belonged to this last category, and at first was probably occupied chiefly in getting wills registered, serving process and carrying documents to and from counsel's offices and the courts of law. Soon after he joined the firm, it removed to 1, Raymond Buildings, where the clerks' office on the second floor looked out upon the street, and afforded the new arrival an opportunity of dropping cherrystones from the window on the hats of passers-by, to their great annoyance and his intense delight. Ellis & Blackmore were the London agents for certain provincial solicitors, and Dickens, we are told, soon became very handy in doing the work at

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the public offices. His salary, which was at first ten shillings or ten shillings and sixpence, had been increased to fifteen shillings when he left in November, 1828.

For a brief interval he is said to have been in the employ of another lawyer, though there is some difference of opinion as to whether this was before or after his engagement with Ellis & Blackmore and there is little evidence in support of either contention. Mr. F. G. Kitton says that "On his departure from the offices of Messrs. Ellis & Blackmore, he went temporarily to fulfil similar duties in that of another lawyer, Mr. Molloy, of New Square, Lincoln's Inn."¹ Robert Langton,² on the other hand, assumes that Molloy preceded Blackmore as Dickens' employer, and Mr. J. W. T. Ley states that Dickens was with Molloy "for a few weeks between leaving school and going to Mr. Blackmore's."³ The lawyer in

¹ *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, 1890, p. 10.

² *Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens*, 1891, pp. 93, 94.

³ *The Dickens Circle*, 2nd ed., 1919, p. 6.

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question is described in the *Law List* of the time as Charles Molloy, barrister, and prior to 1829 his office was at 6, Symonds Inn, Chancery Lane. Subsequently he is found at 8, New Square, Lincoln's Inn, so that if Dickens was with him there it must have been after he had left the service of Ellis & Blackmore. Molloy is thought to have been the prototype of Mr. Vholes, the solicitor for Richard Carstone in the *Bleak House* Chancery suit.

Nearly all Dickens' biographers concur in stating that it was the example of his father which led him to turn his thoughts to parliamentary reporting, and although Charles Kent has roundly declared that the elder Dickens "never was a parliamentary reporter at all" and that he "knew absolutely nothing of shorthand,"¹ there is no lack of evidence that he was engaged in the Gallery of the House of Commons. In reply to an enquiry on

¹ *The Journalist*, vol. i, p. 17 (Dec., 1879).

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the point, Sir Henry F. Dickens, K.C., the novelist's only surviving son, says "That John Dickens was a 'parliamentary reporter' cannot be open to question. John Forster, who would know better than anybody, is far too definite and positive in his assertion to allow any doubt. Whether he learned shorthand is another matter as to which I am not in a position to give an opinion."

Alexander Andrews, in his *History of British Journalism* (1859), states that "Dickens' father, Mr. John Dickens, had sat in the Gallery before him. Originally employed in the Navy Pay Department, he was pensioned off at the close of the war, and coming to London, became a newspaper reporter." John Dickens had dabbled in journalism some years before this, for when, in the spring of 1820, a disastrous fire broke out in Chatham, he contributed an account of it to the *Times* as well as two guineas to

* Vol. ii, p. 211.

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the relief fund.¹ He received £350 a year from the Navy Pay Office, in whose service he remained until 9th March, 1825. When he was recalled from Chatham to London in the winter of 1822-3, however, his Micawberish propensity for lavish disbursements had already involved him in financial stress, and pressure from his creditors was no doubt the primary reason of his seeking to supplement his income by occasional work for the newspapers, while Mrs. Dickens seconded his efforts as best she could by starting a school for girls in Gower Street.

As to his father's stenographic attainments, Dickens confided to George Lear, one of his fellow clerks in the office of Ellis & Blackmore, that he was a "first-rate shorthand writer on Gurney's system, and a capital reporter, and that he was at one time on a paper called the *British Press*." Confirmation of this is supplied

¹ Langton, *Childhood and Youth of Dickens*, 1891, p. 40.

² Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, 1890, p. 132.

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by Samuel Carter Hall, supposed by some to be pilloried as Pecksniff, who was a reporter on the *British Press* in 1826. He asserts that the elder Dickens, "a gentleman of no great intellectual capacity," was then a member of the parliamentary corps of that journal, and adds: "Now and then there came to the office a smart, intelligent, active lad, who brought what was then called 'penny-a-line stuff'; that is to say, notices of accidents, fires, police reports, such as escaped the more regular reporters, for which a penny a printed line was paid."¹ The lad in question was Charles Dickens, and the fact that his father and one of his maternal uncles were shorthand writers may have suggested to him the idea of taking up the study of stenography as a potential means of assisting to restore the family fortunes. John Henry Barrow, a barrister of Gray's Inn and a brother of Mrs. Dickens, was

¹ *Retrospect of a Long Life*, 1883, vol. i, p. 111; *Book of Memories*, 1871, p. 451.

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not only connected with the *Times*, the *Morning Herald*, and other newspapers, but in 1828 he started an ambitious venture called the *Mirror of Parliament* as a rival to *Hansard*, and found employment thereon for his brother-in-law. Edward Barrow, another uncle of Dickens, was also a newspaper reporter.¹ Nor can it be doubted that an important factor which influenced young Dickens' decision was his attendance at the courts at Doctors' Commons, whither his duties as a solicitor's clerk frequently took him. In those courts he must have been an impatient listener to the arguments of

¹ Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, p. 12. In later years, when Charles had won his journalistic spurs, whatever service his father may have rendered him by way of introduction to the world of newspapers was more than repaid. The *Daily News* was launched in 1846. Its first editor was Charles Dickens, at a salary of £2,000 a year, all the appointments were on the same lavish scale, and Dickens' father, then in his 60th year, was responsible for the parliamentary reporting. Laman Blanchard, Blanchard Jerrold, J. A. Crowe and more than a dozen others being subordinate to him. (H. R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers*, vol. ii (1887), p. 143). Within less than a month Charles had resigned the editorship, but John Dickens remained a member of the staff up to the time of his death in 1851.

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red-robed counsel and red-faced judges, and the desire to relieve the wearisome prolixity of their "very long and grave speeches" or of evidence "just twice the length of *Robinson Crusoe*" may well have strengthened his resolve to make himself master of an art which had proved of such signal service to his father.

For this period of Dickens' career the autobiographical value of *David Copperfield* is undeniable, and when due allowance has been made for occasional flights of fancy and humorous elaboration the narrative may be regarded as at many points a fairly accurate reflex of the author's own experience.

"I had heard that many men distinguished in various pursuits had begun life by reporting the debates in Parliament. Traddles having mentioned newspapers to me, as one of his hopes, I had put the two things together, and told Traddles in my letter that I wished to know how I could qualify myself for

this pursuit. Traddles now informed me, as the result of his inquiries, that the mere mechanical acquisition necessary, except in rare cases, for thorough excellence in it, that is to say, a perfect and entire command of the mystery of shorthand writing and reading, was about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages ; and that it might perhaps be attained, by dint of perseverance, in the course of a few years. Traddles reasonably supposed that this would settle the business ; but I, only feeling that here indeed were a few tall trees to be hewn down, immediately resolved to work my way on to Dora through this thicket, axe in hand.

“ ‘ I am very much obliged to you, my dear Traddles ! ’ said I. ‘ I’ll begin to-morrow. ’

“ Traddles looked astonished, as well he might ; but he had no notion as yet of my rapturous condition.

“ ‘ I’ll buy a book, ’ said I, ‘ with a good

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scheme of this art in it ; I'll work at it at the Commons, where I haven't half enough to do ; I'll take down the speeches in our court for practice—Traddles, my dear fellow, I'll master it ! ' ' "

Abundant evidence has been forthcoming in recent years that the rapturous condition which Dickens ascribed to Traddles was a true description of his own feelings about this time. Early in 1830 he had fallen under the spell of Maria Beadnell, the original of Dora, his youthful passion for whom became thenceforward the dominant influence in all his actions and aspirations. He had made her acquaintance through his friend Henry Kolle, a young quilt printer of Addle Street, Aldermanbury. Kolle was himself engaged to one of the three daughters of George Beadnell, who shared house with his brother John, the manager at Smith, Payne & Smith's, bankers, of 1, Lombard Street. The family lived at No. 2, over the bank pre-

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mises, where Dickens became a frequent visitor, and the encouragement he received from the coquettish Maria was sufficient to stimulate his ambition and spur him on to greater efforts than he had yet put forth. "Whatever of fancy, romance, energy, passion, aspiration and determination belong to me," he wrote to her many years afterwards, "I never have separated and never shall separate from the hard-hearted little woman—you—whom it is nothing to say I would have died for with the greatest alacrity. It is a matter of perfect certainty to me that I began to fight my way out of poverty and obscurity, with one perpetual idea of you."

CHAPTER II

TAMING THE STENOGRAPHIC SHREW

The passage in which the successive stages of David Copperfield's struggles to master the art of stenography are recounted in Dickens' own inimitable way has been often cited, but it will bear repetition here.

“ I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary debates, to cool. It was one of the irons I began to heat immediately, and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance I may honestly admire. I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence) ; and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of dis-

traction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else, entirely different ; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles ; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs ; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong place ; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters ; the most despotic characters I have ever known ; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen and ink sky-rocket stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it ;

Arbitrary Characters for Prepositions and Terminations &c.

t	ab-ob-observe	y	may	1	below
	ance-ation	~	been	4	behind
-	able-ible	)	doth	(	covetous
o	ch-such		that-they	1	foundation
o	chr-church		thy of	1	and-hand
	-charge	e	consequence	)	magnify
^	sh-she	~	particular-by	=	even-heaven
t	sal-sub-subject	~	could	~	ought
\	th-that-thed	.	I		between
d	ver-ever	d	it is	~	betwixt
~	wt-wt-will	d	it is not	o	about
	would	p	is it	^	advance-stage
l	ward-word	:	to the	~	plaintiff
	vad-ved-vid	:	and the	\	defendant
^	with	:	by the	o	the World
\	thou	(	shall, should	o	this World
)	after	<	said-side	o	the other Worlds
l	had-hath	o	not	o	from one end of
p	might	i	above		the World to the other

THE "ARBITRARY CHARACTERS" OF GURNEY'S SHORTHAND, CALLED BY DAVID COPPERFIELD "THE MOST DESPOTIC CHARACTERS I HAVE EVER KNOWN."

then, beginning again, I forgot them ; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system ; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.

“ It might have been quite heart-breaking, but for Dora, who was the stay and anchor of my tempest-driven bark. Every scratch in the scheme was a gnarled oak in the forest of difficulty, and I went on cutting them down, one after another, with such vigour, that in three or four months I was in a condition to make an experiment on one of our crack speakers in the Commons. Shall I ever forget how the crack speaker walked off from me before I began, and left my imbecile pencil staggering about the paper as if it were in a fit !

“ This would not do, it was quite clear. I was flying too high, and should never get on, so. I resorted to Traddles for advice ; who suggested that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to

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my weakness. Very grateful for this friendly aid, I accepted the proposal ; and night after night, almost every night, for a long time, we had a sort of private Parliament in Buckingham Street, after I came home from the Doctor's.

“ I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else ! My aunt and Mr. Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speaker or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to keep the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr. Canning, would work himself into the most violent heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy and corruption of my aunt and Mr. Dick ; while I used to sit, at a little distance,

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with my note-book on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main . . .

“ Often and often we pursued these debates until the clock pointed to midnight, and the candles were burning down. The result of so much good practice was, that by-and-by I began to keep pace with Traddles pretty well, and should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them, I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions on an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists’ shops !

“ There was nothing for it, but to turn back and begin all over again. It was very hard, but I turned back, though with a heavy heart, and began laboriously and methodically to plod over the same tedious ground at a snail’s pace ; stopping to examine minutely every speck in the way, on all sides, and making the

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most desperate efforts to know these elusive characters by sight wherever I met them."

The identity of Tommy Traddles, whose complaisance in dictating the speeches of parliamentary orators was no inconsiderable factor in the young stenographer's ultimate success, has not been satisfactorily established. The claims of Daniel Tobin, his school chum who appears to have acted as his amanuensis for a time, and of Thomas Mitton, his fellow clerk in the lawyer's office, with whom he maintained a close friendship for many years and who was employed by Dickens on various occasions, seem at first sight to be strong. There are, however, good grounds for supposing that the original of Traddles may have been Thomas Noon Talfourd, who for a short period was a parliamentary reporter in the service of the *Times*, and to whom *Pickwick* was dedicated in affectionate terms.

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The textbook from which Dickens acquired the rudiments of shorthand was that of Thomas Gurney, entitled *Brachygraphy, or an easy and compendious System of Shorthand*, of which eighteen editions were issued between 1750 and 1884. The one in which he invested was presumably the 15th, "published as the Act directs, Jany. 1, 1825, Price Half a Guinea," by William Brodie Gurney, grandson of the author and official shorthand writer to the Houses of Parliament since 1813. It varies only in some minor details from the original, which, as the elder Gurney acknowledged, was based on the system of William Mason, a London writing master, printed in 1707 under the title *La Plume Volante*.

The fact that his father and uncle were both writers of this old system was doubtless the chief consideration which induced the young aspirant for stenographic honours to pay 10s. 6d. for Gurney's book when there were several



"TRADDLES MAKES A FIGURE IN PARLIAMENT AND I REPORT HIM."
(From the original illustration by H. K. Broene).

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newer and cheaper manuals on the market. One such treatise which enjoyed well-merited popularity was Harding's modification of Taylor's stenography, published in 1823, at 3s. 6d. It had already reached its seventh or eighth edition and ultimately led to the publication, in the same year as *Pickwick*, of Isaac Pitman's *Stenographic Sound-Hand* at the price of fourpence. Taylor's method presented fewer difficulties to the learner than Gurney's, but the reputation of the latter stood high on account of the excellent work accomplished by it in the hands of the Gurney family and other experts, and before the advent of Pitman it had few serious rivals in the legal circles to which Dickens belonged.¹ In Gurney's system the symbol described by the novelist as "a thing like the beginning of a cobweb," and which represented

¹ My collection of shorthand literature includes a copy of the 16th edition of Gurney's treatise, dated 1835, on the flyleaf of which a former owner has written: "T. H. Tristram, Doctors' Commons."

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the word "expectation," was  ;

while  , which he compared to a pen-and-ink sky-rocket, signified "disadvantageous." Though it has been gradually superseded by more modern methods of shorthand, there are to this day one or two practitioners of Gurney's brachygraphy to be found in the purlieu of St. Stephen's.

Having once "tamed the savage stenographic mystery," as he put it, Dickens lost no time in turning his accomplishment to practical account. Reporting in the law courts, with which he had by this time become well acquainted, offered a more congenial and lucrative occupation than any he had hitherto followed, and opportunities of exercising his newly-acquired skill in this direction must have been fairly numerous. Mr. Blackmore, the Gray's Inn solicitor, has told us that after Dickens left his service he saw his quondam employee at times taking notes of cases as a reporter in the Lord

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Chancellor's Court. Here, too, Dickens' fellow clerk, George Lear, recalled having seen him sitting in the well of the court, with his pencils sharpened ready to take a judgment which was going to be delivered by one of the Vice-Chancellors.¹ It will be remembered that Lincoln's Inn Hall, where the Lord High Chancellor sat in his High Court of Chancery, "a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains," was the scene of the interminable trial of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* in *Bleak House*, The picture of the old Court of Chancery, with its owlsh aspect and "the drawl languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank," was unquestionably drawn from Dickens' vivid recollection of scenes he had himself

¹ Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, 1890, p. 133.

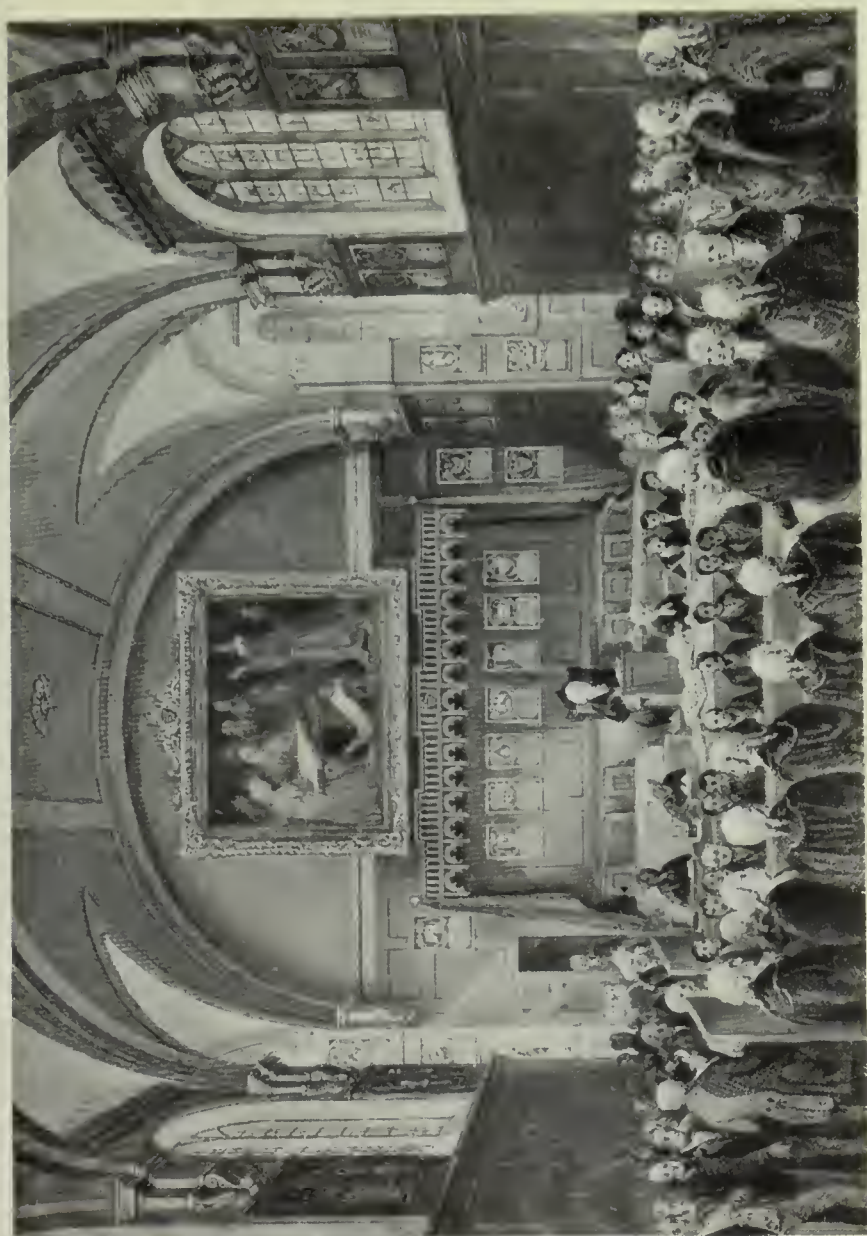
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witnessed, as were the habitués of the court, from the Lord Chancellor, the solicitors, the counsel and the registrar to "the shorthand writers, the reporters of the court and the reporters of the newspapers," who "invariably decamp with the rest of the regulars when Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes on."

Sir Chartres Biron has pointed out that it was while acting as a reporter that Dickens acquired that wonderful understanding of court work, in a layman almost uncanny. "No author has ever reproduced so surely the atmosphere and feeling of a trial. There is hardly an aspect of the law courts that is not caught and crystallised for ever in the *cause célèbre* of *Bardell v. Pickwick*."¹

From the intimate knowledge of police-court procedure displayed in some of his books it is reasonable to infer that Dickens also plied his pencil at Bow Street and other metropolitan police

¹ *National Review*, vol. lxxiii, p. 809 (Aug., 1919).



THE COURT OF CHANCERY. LINCOLN'S INN HALL. IN DICKENS' TIME.

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courts, or, as they were then called, police offices. The Bow Street police court of *Oliver Twist*, built in 1825, was located on the west side of the street, between Russell Street and Covent Garden Theatre. It was the oldest of all the London police courts and had the most extensive jurisdiction. The "very notorious Metropolitan Police office" presided over by Mr. Fang was at No. 54, Hatton Garden.

Glimpses of the Old Bailey sessions in the *Sketches* and elsewhere betray a familiarity with that institution which cannot be wholly attributable to one or two casual visits. The Central Criminal Court was the scene of some stirring events in the novels: Fagin's trial in *Oliver Twist*; the trial of the returned convict, Magwitch, in *Great Expectations*; and the memorable trial in *A Tale of Two Cities*, when Sydney Carton rendered such signal service to Charles Darnay. Kit Nubbles, in *The Old*

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Curiosity Shop, also stood his trial at the Old Bailey.

The young stenographer's ultimate goal was the Gallery of the House of Commons, but admittance to its sacred precincts was denied to all but the *elite*, and Dickens could not as yet claim to be of their number. Impelled by ambition and the bright eyes of Maria Beadnell, however, he spared no effort to acquire the general and technical knowledge indispensable in the pursuit of his newly-chosen profession, and it was doubtless with this object in view that he sought to gain access to the rich stores of the British Museum Library. No sooner had he attained the specified age for admission than he applied for a reader's ticket, the records of the Museum showing that he entered the reading-room on 8th February, 1830, the day after his eighteenth birthday. He was then living at 10, Norfolk Street, Fitzroy Square, and one of his guarantors was Mr. C. W. Charlton,

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of 16, Berners Street, whose wife was related to Dickens' mother. The knowledge of men and things assimilated in the course of his daily work by dint of keen observation and a lively interest in all that went on around him was now supplemented by his studies in the great national storehouse of literature and learning, where many of the leisure hours of the next few years were to be spent. The only accommodation for students at that time was what is now known as the "North Library" at the north-east corner of the Museum, the entrance being in Montague Street. As late as 2nd February, 1833, his name reappears in the reading-room books with the address to which he had just moved, 18, Bentinck Street, Manchester Square.

CHAPTER III

DOCTORS' COMMONS

According to Forster, Charles Dickens "had to pass nearly two years as a reporter for one of the offices in Doctors' Commons before he became a sharer in parliamentary toils and triumphs." Save for this passing allusion, Dickens' biographers are provokingly silent as to his activities during this period, though he himself, in one of his letters to Forster, gave a clue to their nature when he referred to "the time when I was at Doctors' Commons as a shorthand writer for the proctors." This could only mean that he was employed by the proctors of Doctors' Commons to take notes of cases on behalf of their clients, just as the shorthand writers who practise in the law

courts to-day receive their instructions from the solicitors engaged by litigants. At some date in 1830 Dickens had, in fact, rented an office in Doctors' Commons and set up in business for himself as a professional shorthand writer.

The exact location of that office is determined by reference to the annual *Law List*, in which the entry "C. Dickins, 5, bell-yard, doctors' commons," is first found in 1831 under the heading "Shorthand Writers."¹ The list was, however, compiled some months in advance of publication, and Dickens was there at least as early as November, 1830. In the Post Office London Directory for 1829-1834 the name of the tenant of No. 5, Bell Yard is given as Charles Edward Fenton, proctor. The explanation of this apparent contradiction is doubtless to be found in the circumstance that

¹ Mr. C. Van Noorden, who first drew attention to this entry in February, 1912 (*Nash's Magazine*, vol. v., p. 663), states that the name persists from 1831 to 1836, when it disappears. As a matter of fact, it is found in each issue of the *Law List* up to and including 1844.

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Dickens shared the office with Fenton, perhaps as a sub-tenant ; at all events, it is certain that he was employed by the proctor to report cases on his behalf. Prior to 1829 Fenton's office was at 1, Bell Yard, and by 1835 he had moved to 7, Great Carter Lane. Then, as now, the little group of London professional stenographers were, for the most part, clustered in the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn, one or two being scattered about the City and Westminster. Dickens' object in establishing himself at Bell Yard, a little turning out of Carter Lane, was probably to be on the spot with a view to specialising in the work of the courts sitting in Doctors' Commons.

The college of the doctors of civil and canon laws practising in the ecclesiastical and admiralty courts which figured in the annals of London for three centuries as Doctors' Commons is so inseparably associated with Dickens' early youth and exercised so important an influence on

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his destinies that it is a matter for surprise that his biographers have passed so lightly over this phase of the novelist's career. In the "lazy old nook near St. Paul's Churchyard" and its immediate vicinity were spent three or four of the most impressionable years of his life, and allusions to it, direct and indirect, are scattered throughout his writings. For the edification of his young friend David Copperfield, the jovial Steerforth explained that Doctors' Commons was "a little out-of-the-way place where they adminster what is called ecclesiastical law and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of Acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's a place that has an ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and marriages, and disputes among ships and boats."

One of the *Sketches by Boz* contains a

graphic description of the institution “where they grant marriage-licences to love-sick couples and divorces to unfaithful ones, register the wills of people who have any property to leave, and punish hasty gentlemen who call ladies by unpleasant names.” There is a reference in *Oliver Twist* to the great expense of a divorce suit in Doctors’ Commons ; and readers of *Master Humphrey’s Clock* may remember that the last will and testament of Villiam Blinder, the hostler, though chalked on the lid of a corn chest, had to be sent there to be proved. The matrimonial misadventure of the elder Mr. Weller at the Commons is a familiar episode in the *Pickwick Papers*. The old gentleman paid another visit to the place in connection with the probate of his wife’s will ; and, although he did not mention it by name, the cobbler who was Sam Weller’s fellow prisoner in the Fleet made unmistakeable reference to it when he traced the beginning of his



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misfortunes to certain proceedings "in a back room somewhere down by Paul's Churchyard," before three or four very sleepy gentlemen, who in one court were called doctors and in the other delegates.

The general appearance and approaches of Doctors' Commons were thus tersely described by Sam Weller: "Paul's Churchyard, sir; low archway on the carriage-side, bookseller's at one corner, hot-el at the other, and two porters in the middle as touts for licences." The main entrance to the college was in Knightrider Street. It consisted of two quadrangles in which were the dining-hall, the library, the doctors' chambers and the common hall where the courts held their sittings.

The principal ecclesiastical court was the Court of Arches, the appellate court of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Others were the Prerogative Court, where testamentary causes were tried; the Consistory Court of the Bishop of London,

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which differed from the other consistory courts throughout the country only by reason of its importance as including the metropolis in its sphere of operations ; the Court of Faculties, which granted dispensations, faculties, and licences to marry without the publication of banns ;¹ and the Delegates' Court, formerly the supreme court of appeal in ecclesiastical and maritime disputes. The High Court of Admiralty was an important tribunal with jurisdiction on the high seas all over the world.

When the courts were in full operation their times of session were regulated by terms, a certain day of the week being assigned to each for hearing its causes. The practitioners were divided into two classes, advocates and proctors, whose functions corresponded to those of barristers and solicitors in the courts of common law and equity. The subjects which

¹ On 28th March, 1836, Charles Dickens himself took out a licence at Doctors' Commons for his marriage to Catherine Hogarth.

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came before the courts included, as in Chaucer's day, cases

“ Of defamation and avouterie,
Of church reves, and of testaments,
Of contracts, and lack of sacraments,
Of usure and of simony also”—

besides those of sacrilege, blasphemy, church rates, tithes, penance, divorce, and a variety of others chiefly connected with the discipline of the Church, its buildings and its officers. Almost the only criminal cases brought before the ecclesiastical courts in Dickens' time were those for “ brawling ” and “ smiting ” in churches or places attached, and for defamation, generally of female character—hence the playful allusion to “ hasty gentlemen who call ladies by unpleasant names.” The nature of the business in the Court of Arches may be judged from the brief summary given in the report for the three years 1827-1829. There were 21 matrimonial cases, one case of

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defamation, four of brawling, five church smiting, one church rate, one legacy, one tithes, four correction. Some of the cases were of an absurdly trivial character.

One was heard originally in the Arch-deacon's Court at Totnes, whence there had been an appeal to the Court at Exeter, thence to the Arches, and finally to the Delegates, the issue having been simply which of two persons had the right of hanging his hat on a particular peg.

Mr. William Douglas, who in 1868 and for some time afterwards was manager to a firm of proctors in Doctors' Commons, declares that "at that time when there were several persons who remembered Dickens, it was currently stated, and I have never heard it questioned, that he was a clerk in the employment of a firm of proctors, named Smale & Laurie, whose office was situated on the north side of Carter Lane (in Dickens' time called Great Carter Lane), at the south-west corner of Dean's Court, so that going

down Dean's Court from St. Paul's Churchyard it was the last house on the right. In my time the firm was Laurie and Keen, and the clerks in their office, one of whom remembered Dickens, used to point out the seat in the general office on the ground floor which the future novelist occupied. The house was demolished many years since, Messrs. Laurie and Keen removing to Godliman Street, where the business is still carried on, under the style of Keen, Rogers & Co."¹

The firm of Keen, Rogers & Co. is now (1925) again located in Carter Lane, at No. 59, where the stool which Dickens is said to have occupied is still in use. It may be doubted, however, whether Dickens' employment by Smale & Laurie was on any more permanent footing than that of an occasional reporter of cases in which that firm was particularly

¹ *The Dickensian*, vol. viii, p. 75 (1912). One of the proctors enumerated in the *Law List* from 1825 to 1842 is H. L. Smale, Dean's Court, Doctors' Commons; and the same name is found among the subscribers to the *Mirror of Parliament* on 4th February, 1828.

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interested. This is confirmed to some extent by the present head of the firm, Mr. Rogers, whose impression, based on the recollections of the late Mr. Keen, is that Dickens was not a regular clerk in the office but used it only for the purpose of transcribing his shorthand notes.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORIGIN OF A "BOZ" SKETCH.

Among the cases which came before the ecclesiastical courts of Doctors' Commons shortly after the young shorthand writer had installed himself in Bell Yard were two which, though commonplace enough in themselves, are of peculiar interest as illustrating Dickens' method of turning to account even the most trivial incidents which came under his observation in the course of his daily work. They arose out of a disturbance in the vestry-room of the venerable church of St. Bartholomew-the-Great, Smithfield. Objection had been taken by some of the parishioners to the levying of a poor rate, an altercation ensued, and

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proceedings were instituted against two of the aggrieved ratepayers by one of the churchwardens, Charles Jarman, the proctor engaged to act on the plaintiff's behalf being Dickens' co-tenant, Fenton. The suits were heard separately in the Consistory Court of London before Dr. Stephen Lushington, who delivered judgment against each of the delinquents on 18th November, 1830. Charles Dickens was present on this occasion, the two judgments were taken down in court by his nimble pen, and Dickens' transcripts from his shorthand notes are still preserved among the archives of St. Bartholomew's. One of them is headed, in the legal jargon of the time : " The Office of the Judge promoted by Jarman against Bagster." The heading of the second is identical save that the defendant's name is Wise. Beneath the title in each case is written : " Copy from Mr. C. Dickens' Shorthand Notes," and at the end of the transcripts is the certification : " Xd.

— In the —
Consistory Court
— of —
London

Second Session Michaelmas Term 1838
Thursday November the 15th —

The Office of the Judge
promoted by

Sarman against Bagster

Penon

copy from Mr. C Dickens' shorthand notes

Sentence of the Judge.

D^r Lushington

It appears to the
Court that it is first necessary to
consider the nature of the charges
which

FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST PAGE OF A CONSISTORY COURT
JUDGMENT TAKEN IN SHORTHAND BY DICKENS.
(From the original MS. in St. Bartholomew's Church).

Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer

C. Dickens, Shorthand Writer, 5, Bell Yard, Doctors' Commons."

These are the only examples of Dickens' work as a professional shorthand writer (as distinct from his work as a reporter for the Press) known to exist, and I am indebted to my friend Mr. George Walpole for the results of an exhaustive examination he has made of these highly interesting Dickens manuscripts. After carefully comparing the two documents with such coeval specimens of the novelist's handwriting as are now accessible, examining the nature and appearance of the few alterations made in the text, and considering generally the way in which the two brochures are turned out, finally, for presentation to the Court, Mr. Walpole is convinced that the whole of the manuscript, including the endorsement on the covers, is Dickens' holograph. There are more erasures and alterations than one would expect to find in a copy. The corrections

The Origin of a "Boz" Sketch

are such as would naturally occur to the writer as he went along, transcribing from his notes. They are mostly in the nature of "editing," that is, correcting slips of the speaker, almost inevitable in an extempore judgment ; occasionally there is an alteration with the running pen of a slip of the writer, perceived the instant after it was made. Everything points to their being the work of a young shorthand writer, with no long experience behind him.

Apart from their value as examples of Dickens' activity as a professional stenographer, these documents are of considerable literary importance, for they constitute the actual record of incidents which furnished the material for one of the most entertaining of the *Sketches by Boz*, that entitled "Doctors' Commons."¹ A diverting account is there given of a "brawling case" tried in the Court of Arches, and described as "The Office of

¹ First published in the *Morning Chronicle*, 11th Oct., 1836.

the Judge promoted by Bumble against Sludberry." The court, the judge—"a very fat and red-faced gentleman in tortoiseshellspectacles," who "spoke very fast, but that was habit; and rather thick, but that was good living"—the counsel in crimson gowns and wigs, the proctors in stiff neckcloths and black gowns with white fur collars, and the other officers of the court, are depicted with pungent humour, and the narrative proceeds :—

"We found by the opening speech of the counsel for the promoter, that, under a half-obsolete statute of one of the Edwards, the Court was empowered to visit with the penalty of excommunication, any person who should be proved guilty of the crime of 'brawling,' or 'smiting,' in any church or vestry adjoining thereto; and it appeared, by some eight-and-twenty affidavits, which were duly referred to, that on a certain night, at a certain vestry-meeting, in a certain

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parish particularly set forth, Thomas Sludberry, the party appeared against in that suit, had made use of, and applied to Michael Bumble, the promoter, the words ' You be blowed ' ; and that, on the said Michael Bumble and others remonstrating with the said Thomas Sludberry, on the impropriety of his conduct, the said Thomas Sludberry repeated the aforesaid expression, ' You be blowed ' ; and, furthermore, desired and requested to know, whether the said Michael Bumble ' wanted anything for himself ' ; adding, ' that if the said Michael Bumble did want anything for himself, he, the said Thomas Sludberry, was the man to give it him ' ; at the same time making use of other heinous and sinful expressions, all of which, Bumble submitted, came within the intent and meaning of the Act ; and therefore he, for the soul's health and chastening of Sludberry, prayed for sentence of excommunication against him accordingly.

“ Upon these facts a long argument was entered into, on both sides, to the great edification of a number of persons interested in the parochial squabbles, who crowded the Court ; and when some very long and grave speeches had been made *pro* and *con*, the red-faced gentleman in the tortoiseshell spectacles took a review of the case, which occupied half an hour more, and then pronounced upon Sludberry the awful sentence of excommunication for a fortnight, and payment of the costs of the suit. Upon this, Sludberry, who was a little, red-faced, sly-looking ginger-beer seller, addressed the Court, and said, if they'd be good enough to take off the costs, and excommunicate him for the term of his natural life instead, it would be much more convenient to him, for he never went to church at all.”

Although the actual cases of *Jarman v. Bagster* and *Jarman v. Wise* were, for technical reasons, tried separately, both

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arose out of one incident. The proceedings were instituted under the Statute 5 and 6 Edw. VI., c. 4, and the charge was that of "quarrelling, chiding and brawling by words in the Vestry-room and creating a riot and disturbance therein." The language complained of differed slightly from that attributed by Dickens to the little ginger-beer seller. One of the defendants, Samuel Bagster,¹ is said to have seated himself upon the table in the vestry-room, abused the "promoter" Jarman, and "called out to him in a loud and angry tone of voice, 'You are a liar!'" The other, Richard Wise, called him "a drunken churchwarden" and declared that he and his fellow wardens were drunk every day. He added, "You are a pretty fellow for a churchwarden—only an under-clerk to a woollen-draper," and "then and there used other brawling expressions." The judgment entered

¹ Samuel Bagster, eldest son of the well-known Bible publisher, was in business as a printer in Bartholomew Close at this time.

against Wise was suspension from entering the church "for the term of one fortnight" and payment of £35 *nomine expensarum*. The case against Bagster being weaker in point of proof of the words uttered, the only order made against him was for the payment of £20 towards the costs.

The points of resemblance between the Consistory Court hearing and Dickens' burlesque of the proceedings in the "Boz" sketch are sufficiently striking to leave no room for doubt as to the source of his inspiration. The "half-obsolete statute of one of the Edwards" under which the case was brought, the charge of "brawling," the specifying of a vestry-room as the scene of the squabble, the sentence of suspension from entering the church for a fortnight and payment of the costs—all the essential features are the same in both. Sludberry's brazen appeal to the judge to remit the costs and make the sentence one of excommunica-

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tion for life is, of course, a touch of pure Dickens fun.

To what extent the proctor for the promoter in the Consistory Court hearing may have served as a model for Mr. Spenlow is an interesting speculation which cannot be pursued here. At all events, the suit which Dickens reported in 1830 cannot fail to recall the "excommunication case" in Doctors' Commons, described as "The Office of the Judge promoted by Tipkins against Bullock for his soul's correction," which was attended by Spenlow and Copperfield. "It arose out of a scuffle between two churchwardens, one of whom was alleged to have pushed the other against a pump; the handle of which pump projecting into a school-house, which school-house was under a gable of the church roof, made the push an ecclesiastical offence."

Another reminiscence of the Doctors' Commons reporting days is the allusion in *David Copperfield* to a divorce suit

even greater than the offence itself. The
expense of these proceedings when it falls on
the shoulders of those convicted under this
statute, is so heavy, as in many instances
to bear no proportion to the guilt committed,
and it would be in direct opposition to all
general rules and principles, on which
punishment is inflicted if such were to be
the case. ^{in the present instance} The legislature in providing for
offences of this description, had no other
object in view than the interest of the public
at large, - it did so for the purpose of
preventing the commission of the like offences
in future; but if the punishment were to
be more than adequate to the offence, this
jurisdiction would in the public opinion
be considered oppressive and unjust. Therefore
considering that eight entreaties have been
examined on the part of the Promoter, notwithstanding
my being of opinion that
some of the entreaties which have been
addressed to them have a very remote
bearing on the questions at issue, I shall
content myself with condemning the
Defendant, on the score of L³⁵, nomine
offensarum.

x^{dy}
C. Dickens
Shorthand Writer
5 Bell Yard
Doct^r Commons

10

FACSIMILE OF A PAGE TRANSCRIBED BY DICKENS FROM
HIS SHORTHAND NOTES IN 1830.

(From the original MS. in St. Bartholomew's Church).

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"under an ingenious little statute (repealed now, I believe, but in virtue of which I have seen several marriages annulled), of which the merits were these. The husband, whose name was Thomas Benjamin, had taken out his marriage licence as Thomas only, suppressing the Benjamin, in case he should not find himself as comfortable as he expected. *Not* finding himself as comfortable as he expected, or being a little fatigued with his wife, poor fellow, he now came forward by a friend, after being married a year or two, and declared that his name was Thomas Benjamin, and therefore he was not married at all. Which the Court confirmed, to his great satisfaction."

Dickens' occupation as an independent shorthand writer was at once arduous and precarious. That he found the struggle a severe one may be judged from the fact that he contemplated abandoning it for an entirely different sphere. The theatre had long had an irresistible

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attraction for him, and during this period he rarely missed going to the play every night. Inspired by the "At Homes" of the elder Mathews with the ambition to become an actor, he actually wrote offering his services to George Bartley, the comedian, who was then stage manager of Covent Garden Theatre. "This was at the time when I was at Doctors' Commons as a shorthand writer for the proctors," he told Forster, "and I recollect I wrote the letter from a little office I had there, where the answer came also." The answer was to the effect that Bartley was busy preparing for the production of "The Hunchback," but would write again in a fortnight. Sheridan Knowles' comedy, "The Hunchback," was produced at Covent Garden on 5th April, 1832, so that Dickens cannot have quitted his Bell Yard office much before that date. At the expiration of the stipulated fortnight he was invited to present himself at the

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theatre, but was prevented from doing so on the day appointed for the interview by "a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face." Thus were Dickens' hopes of a stage career dashed.

The reform of judicial procedure in England in 1857 put an end to the corporate existence of what Mr. Boffin perversely miscalled "Doctor Scommmons." Thenceforward the courts were amalgamated with others and thrown open to the whole Bar, the officials lost their special privileges, and ten years later the buildings in which Dickens had worked as a shorthand writer were pulled down, a part of the site being now covered by Queen Victoria Street.

CHAPTER V

A "GREAT SPLASH" IN PARLIAMENT

Forster tells us that Charles Dickens' first parliamentary service was given to an evening paper called the *True Sun*, in 1831, at the age of 19. It has been pointed out, however, that the first number of the *True Sun* was not published until 5th March, 1832, and we have seen that Dickens was still at Doctors' Commons in the spring of that year. Unless, therefore, he began his career as a parliamentary reporter in some other capacity, his association with the Press Gallery was antedated by his biographer as well as by Dickens himself.

The *True Sun* was an offshoot of another evening paper, *The Sun*, which had been founded more than thirty years earlier, and one of Dickens' undated letters to Henry Kolle seems to suggest that he may have been employed there for

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a time. He apologizes for failing to keep an appointment the previous evening, explains that he could not leave the House until 10.15, and adds: "The *Sun* is so obscured that I intend living under the planet no longer than Saturday week next."

On the *True Sun*, edited by Samuel Laman Blanchard, Dickens' position appears to have been that of a supernumerary, liable to be called upon in an emergency, and his duties were more or less perfunctory. It was here that he met his friend and biographer, John Forster, the dramatic critic of the paper. The latter is responsible for the story that one day there was a general strike of the reporters and that Dickens, a young man "whose keen animation of look would have arrested attention anywhere, and whose name, upon enquiry, I then for the first time heard," acted as spokesman for the disgruntled reporters and conducted their case to a triumphant issue.

Concurrently with his engagement on

the *True Sun*, Dickens became a member of the regular reporting staff of his uncle's *Mirror of Parliament*, on which his father was already employed. This remarkable publication purported to furnish a full record of the parliamentary debates, and had earned a high reputation for the accuracy of its reports. It was in 1832 that Edward Morton, an enterprising professional shorthand writer, offered "by means of assistants, to take verbatim minutes of the speeches in both Houses, and to furnish copies thereof, to be kept for the purpose of reference or for publication"; but the petitioner was advised that the *Mirror of Parliament* would be considered to supersede the necessity for any other record of the debates.¹ Emboldened perhaps by this recognition of the usefulness of his publication, John Henry Barrow, of Abingdon Street in the City of Westminster, barrister-at-law and editor of the *Mirror*

¹ A. T. Wright, *Shorthand Writers' Petitions to Parliament* (1899).

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of *Parliament*, presented a similar petition on 12th May, 1834, submitting that it was of the utmost importance that "a full, faithful and impartial parliamentary record, such as is comprised in the *Mirror of Parliament*, be maintained and continued." The petition was withdrawn, however, on the Speaker pointing out that it was based on a breach of privilege.

The office of the *Mirror* was at No. 3, Abingdon Street, and its propinquity to that of the firm of Messrs. Gurney and Sons may have given rise to the legend that Dickens was employed by the latter. G. A. Sala states that he was "for one session, or part of one session at least, engaged on the staff of Messrs. Gurney, the parliamentary shorthand writers, of Abingdon Street." A similar statement is made in Theodore Taylor's anonymous biography of the novelist, but I have failed to find confirmation of it. For some years the Gurneys were located at 16, Essex Street, Strand, and it was not until

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1835 that they moved into the premises at 26, Abingdon Street, Westminster, where their successors are still at work.

The establishment of William Brodie Gurney, who held the appointment of official shorthand writer to the Houses of Parliament for Select Committee work, consisted in 1824 of "four constant clerks," but as he had at that time some thirteen committees to deal with, all sitting at the same time in one House of Parliament or the other,¹ he must frequently have had recourse to outside assistance. In 1833, giving evidence before a Select Committee on House of Commons Offices and Fees, he stated that, in addition to his two sons and an assistant, he employed other shorthand writers, not in his own office, when the number of committees was such as to require it, "having sometimes to provide for twelve Committees of this House on

¹ *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester*, vol. iii (1861), p. 332.

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the same day."¹ It is possible that Dickens may occasionally have reported one of these committees.

Here is what Mr. W. H. Gurney-Salter, grandson of William Brodie Gurney and now in his 88th year, has to say on the subject in a personal letter to myself:—

"When I entered the office in 1859 it was not long before I heard the question discussed, and I well remember that I heard with disappointment that, although the brother of Charles Dickens had been employed as a clerk within the memory of many men who were still there, no one could tell me of any occasion on which Charles Dickens himself had been engaged in any capacity. There were then men who had been in the office for 30 or 40 years, covering all the time when Charles Dickens could have been at work. Moreover, there have been books kept in the office ever since 1810, in which there is a daily record of the work done and the

¹ *Considerations on the Present Position of Shorthand Writing in the Courts and in Parliament*, 1848, p. 13.

men engaged in it. These books were searched, and no entry of Charles Dickens' name appeared. Being unwilling to trust my own memory in this matter, I have caused enquiry to be made of my successor in office, and others who have been engaged there for about 50 years—I did not prompt them, but their recollection confirms mine. One of them said, 'The statement has often been made that Charles Dickens was engaged in our work, but it has been as often contradicted.'"¹

If, indeed, Dickens did any work for the Gurney firm, he must have known Charles Waters, who was in charge of what was spoken of as the "front office"—a sort of accountant, cashier, director-general of the organisation, looking after the thousand and one details impossible

¹ The statement was repeated as recently as 7th July, 1925, by a correspondent of the *Times*, who added that Dickens' desk, with the initials "C.D." cut deeply in the mahogany, is still to be seen in the Gurneys' office. Mr. Gurney-Salter, again appealed to regarding the desk, says: "I have no recollection of ever having seen it, and two old clerks who have been consulted say the same."

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to be dealt with by the busy notetakers. One of the speakers at a dinner given on the occasion of Mr. Gurney-Salter's retirement observed that "if Charles Dickens' graphic pen were available, it would be interesting to recall and to picture for the present generation the characteristics and personalities which in those days made up the shorthand and clerical staffs. It must suffice to say that in both there was a well and even strongly marked individuality, and to an onlooker with any sense of humour there was ample material for interested observation. Old 'Charlie Waters,' as he was affectionately called, was Tim Linkinwater to the life."

Dickens' first session on behalf of the *Mirror*, a brief autumnal one, was marked by the meeting of the Reformed Parliament on 7th August, 1832. The Grey Ministry had already been in power for two years and was to remain in office for a like period. Among the statesmen

whose eloquence the young stenographer recorded were many whose names are prominent in parliamentary annals. In the Commons were Lord John Russell, fresh from his triumphant conduct of the Reform Bill ; Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House; Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary. The opposition was led by Sir Robert Peel, and on the back benches were such men of mark as William Cobbett, Joseph Hume, Daniel O'Connell and Richard Shiel. In the Upper House sat the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, for whose style of oratory Dickens conceived an intense dislike. " The shape of his head (I see it now) was misery to me and weighed down my youth," he wrote thirty years afterwards. Lord Melbourne, soon to take up the reins of government, was also in the Ministry, while the Tory opposition was led by the Duke of Wellington.

Parliamentary reporting at this time

A "Great Splash" in Parliament

had reached its zenith. The Galleries of the Lords and Commons were thronged with men of exceptional ability and, for the most part, of high intellectual attainments ; but the youngster who, in virtue of his remarkable skill as a shorthand writer, had now achieved his ambition to work by the side of these veterans, quickly proved his right to be ranked among the most expert of them. As he himself put it, he made " a great splash " in the Gallery. When Charles Dickens joined the corps of parliamentary reporters in the House of Commons, the accommodation provided for them was altogether inadequate. The only seats reserved exclusively for their use were in the back row of the Strangers' Gallery, an arrangement which did not facilitate their hearing what was said by Members who addressed the House, while the conversation, subdued though it might be, of the strangers who occupied the five or six rows of seats in front of them was

a continual source of annoyance. The conditions of parliamentary reporting are thus described by one of those who had experience of them :—

“ The reporter pushed his way with the crowd to the Strangers’ Gallery. The seat provided for him and the other representatives of the Press was the back seat of that gallery, into which he had to squeeze himself through a doorway about two feet wide. Seated there, he took his notes. There were, perhaps, a hundred seats under him, benches filled by ‘strangers,’ and in this back bench it was very difficult to hear. When he sought egress, he had a hard fight with intervening legs and arms to reach his own door ; often jaded, heated, and laden with anxiety, he had absolutely to push his way in or out—struggling to make room for his successor who was pushing his way in.”

Not until after the fire which destroyed the old House of Commons in October,



THE OLD HOUSE OF COMMONS, SHOWING THE REPORTERS' GALLERY.

A "Great Splash" in Parliament

1834, were the reporters provided with a Gallery to themselves. Dickens remained to witness its establishment and had the distinction of being one of its original occupants.

The session of 1833 opened on 15th February, and to this period belongs an anecdote said to have been related by "Boz" himself and published shortly after his death, though doubt has more than once been expressed as to its complete authenticity. On the introduction of the Coercion Bill on 27th February, Mr. Stanley (afterwards Lord Derby), Secretary for Ireland, spoke at great length on the condition of that unhappy country, for which he took the Irish leader, O'Connell, to task. It was a long and eloquent indictment, occupying many hours in the delivery. Eight reporters were allocated for the work of reporting it on behalf of the *Mirror*, each of them taking "turns" of three-quarters of an hour. Young Dickens was detailed to

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“ take ” the first part, and (as happens not infrequently in such circumstances) it also fell to his lot to report the closing portions of the speech. The whole was given to the press on Saturday, and Dickens repaired to the country for a well-earned rest. Sunday morning had scarcely dawned when his father made his appearance in the bedroom. Mr. Stanley, it appeared, was so dissatisfied with what he had found in print, except the beginning and end of his speech (for which Dickens was responsible), that he had sent immediately to the office and obtained the sheets of those parts of the report. He there found the name of the reporter, written, according to custom, on the margin, and requested that the young man bearing the name of Dickens should be sent for. Dickens’ father, “ all aglow with the prospect of probable promotion,” went immediately to his son’s resting-place in the country and brought him back to town. In telling the story Dickens said :—

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" I remember perfectly to this day the aspect of the room I was shown into, and the two persons in it, Mr. Stanley and his father. Both gentlemen were extremely courteous to me, but I noted their evident surprise at the appearance of so young a man. While we spoke together I had taken a seat extended to me in the middle of the room. Mr. Stanley told me he wished to go over the whole speech and have it written out by me, and if I were ready he would begin now. Where would I like to sit ? I told him I was very well where I was, and we could begin immediately. He tried to induce me to sit at a desk, but at that time in the House of Commons there was nothing but one's knees to write upon, and I had formed the habit of doing my work in that way. Without further pause, he began and went rapidly on, hour after hour, to the end, often becoming very much excited and frequently bringing down his hand with great violence upon

Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer

the desk near which he stood.”¹

Another version of this episode is given in the life of Dickens by Theodore Taylor, on the authority of Charles Gruneisen, a journalist who had made Dickens’ acquaintance in the Gallery, and who is quoted as saying : “ I had a correspondence with Dickens on the subject only some months since, he promising to give me the accurate record of his stenographic feat when he met me. This promise he fulfilled the last time, alas ! I ever saw him alive, at the anniversary dinner of the Newsvendors’ Benevolent Institution. . . . It was in consequence of a reporter having broken down for the *Mirror of Parliament* that the late Lord Derby, after complimenting Dickens for his report in the *Chronicle*, dictated to him his speech—the *Mirror*, as you are aware, in those days giving verbatim reports.” Unfortunately for the trustworthiness of this

¹ James T. Fields in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Boston, vol. xxvi, pp. 236-7, Aug., 1870.

A "Great Splash" in Parliament

account, Dickens was not employed by the *Morning Chronicle* until twelve months or more after the date of the speech to which it refers.

The speech in question is printed in the first of the four bulky volumes of the *Mirror of Parliament* devoted to the session of 1833. In proof of the value of his reports, the editor proudly points to the fact that the *Mirror* was quoted as the authoritative record of the debates 27 times in the House of Commons and five times in the House of Lords. Mr. Walpole informs me that in 1889, when he was editing the official reports, he had occasion to write to Mr. Gladstone. In his reply the G.O.M. remarked that, during the few years of its existence, he had always found the reports of the *Mirror of Parliament* more reliable, as they were much fuller, than those in *Hansard*. It is quite possible that Dickens reported for the *Mirror* Gladstone's maiden speech, delivered on 3rd June, 1833.

Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer

During the progress of the Coercion Bill through the House of Commons some powerful speeches were delivered by O'Connell. One of them is said to have had such an effect on Dickens that he was constrained to lay down his pencil, so moved was the sensitive young stenographer by the orator's vivid picture of a widow seeking her only son among the peasants killed by soldiers in a tithe riot, and, on another occasion, of a young girl shot down whilst leading her blind grandfather along a country lane.¹

For three sessions, from 1832 to 1834, Dickens plied his pencil in the Gallery of the House of Commons on behalf of the *Mirror*, holding his ground with the most experienced of his colleagues, and during the session his weekly earnings amounted

¹ Macdonagh, *The Reporters' Gallery* (1913), p. 354. No authority is given for this statement, but it has a parallel on the other side of the Atlantic. A speech of Abraham Lincoln on 19th May, 1856, has been called "Lincoln's lost speech" because all the reporters present were so carried away by his eloquence that they one and all forgot to take any notes. The report included in Lincoln's collected speeches was made by a young lawyer who "kept his head" sufficiently to take some notes, though not stenographically.

A "Great Splash" in Parliament

to fifteen guineas. The corps of a dozen reporters worked in shifts of three-quarters of an hour. Everything was recorded in the first person, even to the parenthetical interruptions and *mouvements de salle*, entailing a severe physical and mental strain. Only the most robust and qualified exponents of the craft were able to withstand the constant wear and tear, and at times when the debates were prolonged far into the night these stalwarts were able to earn as much as twenty or twenty-five guineas in a week.

While in the Gallery he is said to have been "exceedingly reserved in his manners, though interchanging the usual courtesies of life with all with whom he came in contact in the discharge of his professional duties."¹ Between him and at least two of his Gallery colleagues, however, a warm friendship sprang up which, in the case of one of them, endured throughout Dickens' life. Thomas

¹ Grant, *The Newspaper Press*, 1871, vol. i, p. 296.

Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer

Beard, then a reporter for the *Morning Herald* and afterwards for many years Court Newsman, was "best man" at Dickens' wedding in 1836, his was one of the familiar faces at Twickenham in the summer of 1838, he was present at the *Haunted Man* christening dinner, and when, in 1862, Dickens contemplated a reading tour in America, he proposed to take Beard with him as his secretary. "Only a few weeks before the novelist's death," says Charles Kent, "I remember perfectly well hearing him introduce to some chance acquaintance this trusty ally as the oldest friend he had in the world." Beard's repeated and emphatic assurance to Forster that "there never *was* such a shorthand writer," was confirmed in conversation with Kent, with the added remark that Dickens' command of the Gurney system was nothing less than perfect.

"The only other associate of these early days," says Forster, "to whom I

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(OR)
an easy and compendious System of
SHORT HAND.

by
THOMAS GURNEY,

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JOSEPH GURNEY,

and now practised by
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Price Half a Guinea

TITLE-PAGE OF GURNEY'S "BRACHYGRAPHY," THE
SYSTEM OF SHORTHAND USED BY DICKENS.

Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer

ever heard him refer with special regard was the late Mr. Vincent Dowling, many years editor of *Bell's Life*, with whom he did not continue much personal intercourse, but of whose character as well as talents he had formed a very high opinion." Dowling belonged to a family of accomplished stenographers, several of his brothers being professional shorthand writers. Dickens' senior by 27 years, Vincent Dowling was reporting for the *Observer* in 1816, and in that capacity took notes of an inflammatory speech by James Watson, delivered from a wagon in Spa Fields. In the following year he was called as a witness for the Crown at Watson's trial for high treason, and read in court from his shorthand notes portions of the speech, on which the charge was largely based. It has been claimed for Vincent Dowling that he was the first to discern Dicken's genius for character sketching, and the fact that the latter contributed a number of "Scenes and

A "Great Splash" in Parliament

Characters" to *Bell's Life in London*, the popular sporting journal of which Dowling was editor, would appear to lend colour to the assertion.

In the rare intervals of respite from his exacting toil in the Gallery, Dickens' thoughts continually reverted to Maria Beadnell, notwithstanding the rebuffs he had met with from her parents and the coldness of the lady herself. "When we were falling away from each other," he confessed to her after the lapse of more than twenty years, "I came from the House of Commons many a night at two or three o'clock in the morning, only to wander past the place you were asleep in. And I have gone over that ground within these twelve months, hoping it was not ungrateful to consider whether any reputation the world can bestow is repayment to a man for the loss of such a vision of his youth as mine."¹

¹ *Charles Dickens and Maria Beadnell*, ed. George Pierce Baker, Boston, 1908, p. 95.

CHAPTER VI

THE "MORNING CHRONICLE"

Dickens' uncle Barrow, in whose service on the *Mirror of Parliament* he had displayed such conspicuous ability and zeal, formed so high an opinion of the young man's capacities that he used all his influence to secure the latter's advancement in his profession. One of those to whom he sang the praises of his brilliant nephew, describing him as "the best reporter in the Gallery," was Charles Knight, the publisher, whom he met occasionally in Clowes' printing office;¹ another was John Payne Collier, formerly a *Times* reporter and then on the staff of the *Morning Chronicle*. As early as June 1833, Barrow had spoken to Collier with a view to enlisting his sympathy and aid in

¹ C. Knight, *Passages of a Working Life*, vol. iii, 1865, p. 37.

The Morning Chronicle

obtaining employment for Dickens on that influential newspaper. The episode is thus recorded in Collier's diary:—

“ Mr. John Barrow, who is engaged on the *Times*, where there is no vacancy, told me that he has a clever nephew, named Charles Dickens, who has been employed, I believe, on the *True Sun*, and for whom he is anxious to obtain a situation on the *Morning Chronicle*. Barrow wants me to give him a letter to the proprietor of the *Morning Chronicle*, and I hope, from what I hear, that his application will be successful. I do not often interfere in this way, the only other instances I can recollect being in favour of Douglas Jerrold and William Thackeray, when they were at one time sadly in want of literary work. Barrow I have been acquainted with for the last five or six years—indeed, ever since he presented me with a copy of his poem, I think, on the battle of Talavera, written in obvious imitation of Walter Scott.

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“ I asked Barrow where his nephew had been educated, but he could not exactly tell me,¹ saying that he was the son of a clerk in the naval department at Portsmouth, who had been superseded on a reconstruction of the office, and who had several other children. I enquired his nephew’s qualifications, and the reply was that he was extremely clever, and that he (Barrow) had taught him Gurney’s shorthand, which he wrote well, as had been proved on the *True Sun*, a newspaper which, strange to say, I had seldom seen. His nephew wished of all things to become one of the parliamentary reporters of the *Morning Chronicle*.

“ I asked how old he was, and how he had been employed before he had connected himself with the *True Sun*. The answer was rather ambiguous ; the uncle only knew that his father’s family distresses had driven Charles Dickens to

¹One is reminded of the response of John Dickens to a similar question, as recorded by Forster: “ Why, indeed, Sir—ha! ha!—he may be said to have educated himself!”

The Morning Chronicle

exert himself in any way that would earn a living. . . . I was of opinion that I ought to see more of the young man, and of his doings, before I committed myself by recommending him to a newspaper as a competent reporter ; and at Barrow's instance, I agreed to meet Dickens at dinner, his uncle also informing me that he was cheerful company and a good singer of a comic song."¹

The dinner took place accordingly on 27th July, and the impression created by the young stenographer—"he was so young that he had no vestige of beard or whiskers"—was so entirely favourable that Collier says he had little hesitation in recommending him to the proprietor of the *Morning Chronicle*. The diarist mentions that several comic songs were sung after dinner, two of them by Dickens, "who would not make the attempt until late in the evening, and after a good deal of pressing." Collier adds that

¹ *An Old Man's Diary, Forty Years Ago*, 1872, pp. 12-14.

Dickens was not taken on the staff of the paper by his recommendation, "for some more influential person, whose name I heard, had also spoken on his behalf."

The influential person in question was apparently Joseph Parkes, the parliamentary agent of the Whigs and a constant visitor at the office of the *Morning Chronicle*. Established nearly twenty years before the *Times*, the *Chronicle* had from the outset made a speciality of the publication of the parliamentary debates, and in the fulness of its reports was for many years ahead of its formidable rival. Its editor, John Black, had himself been a reporter under James Perry, who is credited with originating the system of note-taking by relays, and under Black's guidance the reputation of the paper had been fully maintained. Its circulation had fallen off considerably, however, when it passed into the hands of Sir John Easthope, a well-known stockbroker, and two co-proprietors, by whom

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it was converted into a Liberal organ. The staff was reorganised, and on behalf of the new owners Joseph Parkes engaged Thomas Beard as a stenographer of proved capacity, asking him at the same time to recommend another exceptionally able shorthand writer whose competence he could guarantee. Beard unhesitatingly named his young gallery *confrère*, and Dickens was forthwith enrolled on the staff of reporters. Such, at least, is the version given by Charles Kent of Dickens' engagement on the *Morning Chronicle*, and there seems no reason to doubt its substantial accuracy.

James Grant's memory was clearly at fault when, writing some thirty-five years after the event, he asserted that "it was in the year 1835 that Dickens became connected with the *Morning Chronicle*," even though he goes on to say: "I could not be mistaken as to the time, because I remember, as well as if it had been but yesterday, that he came

to it the session after I quitted my connection with that journal." The exact date of Dickens joining the *Chronicle* has not been ascertained ; it could not, however, have been later than the summer of 1834. The session of that year terminated on 15th August, and with it Dickens' connection with the *Mirror of Parliament* ceased.¹ On the *Morning Chronicle* his engagement was not merely sessional, as it had been on the *Mirror*, but extended throughout the year. His salary was fixed at five guineas weekly, this being the remuneration agreed upon by all the London dailies except the *Times*, which declined to be bound by any rule. " Soon afterwards," notes Collier, " I observed a great difference in C.D.'s appearance and dress ; for he had bought

¹ The *Mirror* continued to appear regularly until January, 1837, when it suspended publication until the following November. Lack of public support led to its final demise in October, 1841. Barrow was admitted a member of Gray's Inn on 5th June, 1823, and is described on the register of admissions as " third son of Charles Barrow, of Douglas, Isle of Man, Esq." He is said to have suffered severely from poverty towards the close of his life. He died at Newington on 30th March, 1858 (*Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1858, p. 567).

The Morning Chronicle

a new hat and a very handsome blue cloak, with black velvet facings, the corner of which he threw over his shoulder *à l'espagnole*."

Looking back over his earlier struggles, David Copperfield at 21 (Dickens had reached his majority on 7th February, 1833), soliloquised :—

"I have come legally to man's estate. I have attained the dignity of twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one. Let me think what I have achieved.

"I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the Debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. Britan-

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nia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl : skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an Infidel about it, and shall never be converted."

These reflections were as much those of Dickens as of David Copperfield, and throughout his life the novelist rarely missed an opportunity of giving expression to his views on the subject. In a speech on behalf of the Artists' Benevolent Fund he once declared : " I am strongly disposed to believe that there are very few debates in Parliament so important to the public welfare as a really good picture. I have also a notion that any number of bundles of the driest legal chaff that ever was chopped would be cheaply expended for one really meritorious engraving."¹

¹ *Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. R. H. Shepherd, 1884, p. 207.

The Morning Chronicle

Before the *Morning Chronicle* changed hands its relations with the *Times* had been, according to the latter journal, courteous and friendly ; but its Whig conductors were now accused of “ sweeping up every species of offensive matter within reach of them, with the well-known activity of new brooms, and flinging it hourly ” in the face of its contemporary. The *Chronicle* imputed to its rival “ a reckless disregard of principle which can only be equalled by its utter want of dignity ” ; the *Times* did not scruple to retaliate by stigmatizing “ the poor old *Morning Chronicle* ” as “ the squirt ” ; while epithets such as “ unscrupulous,” “ treacherous,” “ ferocious ” and “ cowardly ” were freely exchanged. At the time when Dickens came under John Black’s tutelage the antagonism between the two newspapers reached its height, and there can be little doubt that the Pott and Slurk episode in *Pickwick* is intended to reproduce and caricature the

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thunders rolled forth by Edward Sterling from Printing House Square and the answering peals that Black discharged from the Strand.¹ The wordy encounters between the *Morning Chronicle* and the powerful journal which was challenging its supremacy are echoed in the unrestrained abuse heaped upon each other by the Eatanswill editors.

¹ T. H. S. Escott, *Masters of English Journalism*, 1911, p. 160.

CHAPTER VII

REPORTING ADVENTURES

In his new sphere the work of reporting was flavoured with a spice of adventure, for Dickens was frequently called upon to undertake long journeys into the country when the House was not in session. Within a month of the prorogation of Parliament a great banquet was offered by the citizens of Edinburgh in honour of the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, on his retirement from office. In the temporary pavilion erected in the High School grounds on Calton Hill nearly 2,800 persons assembled to pay homage to the distinguished guest, upon whom the freedom of the city was conferred. The elaborate arrangements made by the London newspapers to secure a prompt and full record of the speeches are a measure of the importance attached

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to the occasion. The *Times* despatched as many as four shorthand writers, the *Morning Chronicle* sent Beard and Dickens. The two latter travelled to Leith by sea—Dickens' first taste of salt water—arriving a day or two in advance of the meeting. They were in Edinburgh by 13th September, 1834, and the brief account of a promenade concert held there on that day, printed in the *Morning Chronicle* of the 17th, is one of Dickens' earliest pieces of descriptive writing. On the afternoon of the 15th he and Beard gained early admittance to the building where Lord Grey was to be entertained, and their joint report occupies eleven closely-printed columns in the *Morning Chronicle* of the 18th.

The interval between the arrival of the earliest visitors and the guests of the evening was enlivened by an incident which furnished the reporters with an introductory paragraph. The *Morning Chronicle* account of it—quoted here, it is

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believed, for the first time—bears the unmistakeable impress of “Boz’s” authorship :—

“ It had been announced that the dinner would take place at five o’clock precisely ; but Earl Grey, and the other principal visitors, as might have been expected, did not arrive until shortly after six. Previous to their arrival, some slight confusion, and much merriment, was excited by the following circumstance :—A gentleman who, we presume, had entered with one of the first sections, having sat with exemplary patience for some time in the immediate vicinity of cold fowls, roast beef, lobsters, and other tempting delicacies (for the dinner was a cold one), appeared to think that the best thing he could possibly do, would be to eat his dinner, while there was anything to eat. He accordingly laid about him with right good-will, the example was contagious, and the clatter of knives and forks became general. Hereupon,

several gentlemen, who were not hungry, cried out 'Shame!' and looked very indignant; and several gentlemen who were hungry, cried 'Shame!' too, eating, nevertheless, all the while, as fast as they possibly could. In this dilemma, one of the stewards mounted a bench, and feelingly represented to the delinquents the enormity of their conduct, imploring them, for decency's sake, to defer the process of mastication until the arrival of Earl Grey. This address was loudly cheered, but totally unheeded; and this is, perhaps, one of the few instances on record of a dinner having been virtually concluded before it began."

The *Times* reporters scored a point over their rivals by leaving the building towards midnight, fully an hour before the proceedings terminated. Three of them had transcribed their notes whilst the fourth was taking down the words of the latest speaker. His "turn" completed, the quartette took their places

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in a coach-and-four which set off at a gallop for the south, the final portion of the report being written out *en route*. At various stages on the journey relay horses had been provided, with the stipulation that they must cover sixteen miles an hour. Leaving the Scottish capital at 12.30 a.m., the travellers were delayed by various unforeseen circumstances, but reached London the next day at 6 a.m., and a second edition of the *Times* issued at 11 o'clock on the morning of 17th September contained the speeches of Earl Grey, Lord Brougham, and most of the other principal speakers. "Post-horses, macadam roads, shorthand and steam-printing never did more," commented Lord Cockburn in his journal.¹ "Boz" and Beard remained at their posts until 1 a.m., when the meeting was on the point of breaking up, and their report included several speeches delivered after the *Times* men had left, among them

¹ *Journal of Henry, Lord Cockburn, 1831-1854*, vol. i, 1874, p. 68.

those of Sir John Hobhouse, Mr. Ellice, M. Arago (who spoke in French) and Mr. Abercromby. They arrived in London eighteen hours after their rivals, their expenses amounting to £84, whereas the cost to the *Times* of its "scoop" was £250.

Some of the impressions gained on this first visit to Edinburgh were turned to account in the story of the bagman's uncle, and it may be noted parenthetically that within seven years from this date the creator of *Pickwick*, not yet thirty but already world famous, was himself fêted at a public banquet in Edinburgh and received the freedom of the city in his turn.

Shortly after his eventful trip across the border, the young journalist quitted 18, Bentinck Street, where he had been living with his family since the beginning of 1833, and took lodgings in Cecil Street¹ in order to be near the office of his paper at 332, Strand, almost opposite Somerset House. All the members of the editorial

¹ In this little street off the Strand lived Mr. Watkins Tottle, haunted by dreams of wedded bliss.



JOHN BLACK, EDITOR OF THE "MORNING CHRONICLE,"
UNDER WHOM DICKENS WORKED AS A REPORTER.

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and reporting staffs were expected to meet at the office between 10 and 11 each morning to receive instructions from John Black, nor was this rule relaxed even when, as frequently happened, the reporters had been kept hard at work in the gallery until 3 or 4 a.m. Moreover, it was then the usual practice for each reporter, on completing his "turn" in the gallery, to hasten to the office of his newspaper to write out his notes for the printer. As the *Morning Chronicle* office was a mile away from Westminster, this was a particularly irksome arrangement, entailing as it often did more than one journey to and from the House in the same evening. Small wonder that "Boz" should write, in his "Parliamentary Sketch": "We have made some few calls at the aforesaid House in our time—have visited it quite often enough for our purpose, and a great deal too often for our personal peace and comfort."

His stay at Cecil Street was brief, for

reasons which he explained to Henry Kolle in a letter written from North End, Fulham. "The people at Cecil Street put too much water in their hashes, lost a nutmeg grater, attended on me most miserably, etc., etc., and so (detesting petty miseries) I gave them warning and have not yet fixed upon a 'local habitation and a name.' " Soon afterwards, however, he was in rooms at 15, Buckingham Street, Adelphi. It was in this small street that David Copperfield rented from Mrs. Crupp a set of furnished chambers, with a view of the river, consisting of "a little half-blind entry where you could see hardly anything, a little stone-blind pantry where you could see nothing at all, a sitting room and a bedroom." Towards the end of the year Dickens had installed himself in a "three-pair back" at 13, Furnival's Inn, where he was to remain some twelve months, before removing to No. 15.

Experiences such as those connected

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with the Edinburgh expedition provided material for the sketch entitled "Early Coaches," contributed to the *Evening Chronicle* of 19th February, 1835, in which "the miseries inevitably consequent upon a summons to take a hasty journey" are detailed with characteristic humour :—

" You receive an intimation from your place of business that it will be necessary to leave town without delay. You and your family are forthwith thrown into a state of tremendous excitement ; an express is immediately despatched to the washerwoman's ; everybody is in a bustle ; and you, yourself, with a feeling of dignity which you cannot altogether conceal, sally forth to the booking-office to secure your place. Here a painful consciousness of your own unimportance first rushes on your mind—the people are as cool and collected as if nobody were going out of town, or as if a journey of a hundred odd miles were a mere nothing."

An undated letter obviously written about this period shows that Dickens occasionally travelled unaccompanied. It was addressed to Henry Austin, his future brother-in-law, from Furnival's Inn, and is dated "Wednesday Night, past 12."

"I have just been ordered on a journey, the length of which is at present uncertain. I may be back on Sunday very probably, and start again on the following day. . . . Don't laugh. I am going (alone) in a gig; and, to quote the eloquent inducement which the proprietors of Hampstead *chays* hold out to Sunday riders—'the gen'l'm'n drives himself.' I am going into Essex and Suffolk. It strikes me I shall be spilt before I pay a turnpike. I have a presentiment I shall run over an only child before I reach Chelmsford, my first stage."¹

One of Dickens' provincial reporting experiences of which he retained a vivid recollection belongs to the spring of 1835,

¹ *Letters of Charles Dickens*, 2nd ed., 1880, vol. i, p. 2.

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when Lord John Russell, having accepted office in the new Melbourne Ministry unsuccessfully stood for re-election as member for South Devon. Beard and Dickens were detailed to follow the fortunes of the campaign and keep the readers of their paper informed of its progress. The proceedings at one of Lord John's meetings in Castle Yard, Exeter, reported by Dickens and sent off on Friday night, 1st May, were printed in the first edition of the *Morning Chronicle* the next morning—a remarkable achievement in those days when neither telephone nor telegraph was available, and trains had not yet penetrated so far south.

Dickens was warm in praise of the arrangements made for the reporters on this occasion, “a species of orchestra with boardings for seats and desks” having been partitioned off for them in front of the platform. Unluckily, in the course of the speech of the retiring M.P.,

Mr. Bulteel, "there came on a tremendous shower of rain, which made the multitude fly in all directions, and which made its way through the hustings and the temporary shelter provided for the reporters. So heavy a storm was not calculated on, nor guarded against by tarpauling ; and the rain came through the hustings in water-spouts in all directions, leaving no sort of shelter for anyone. The storm continued with inveterate force for half-an-hour, by which time those on and under the hustings were completely drenched. It having then somewhat subsided, portions of the crowd returned, and the proceedings were resumed ; but still the drippings from the hustings were so considerable as to make that station anything but an enviable one. As to taking notes of the speeches, that was almost wholly out of the question, for as fast as any attempts were made to take notes the torrents were nearly sure to 'swamp' them."

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Recalling the incident thirty years later, Dickens said: "The very last time I was in Exeter I strolled into the Castle Yard there to identify, for the amusement of a friend, the spot on which I once 'took,' as we used to call it, an election speech of my noble friend Lord Russell at the Devon contest, in the midst of a lively fight maintained by all the vagabonds in that division of the county, and under such a pelting rain that, I remember, two good-natured colleagues who chanced to be at leisure held a pocket-handkerchief over my notebook, after the manner of a state canopy in an ecclesiastical procession."

Thomas Beard remembered one of the colleagues in question as "old Scott"—perhaps John Scott, a reporter on the staff of the *Morning Advertiser*, or W. D. Scott, of the *Observer*—and tells us that Dickens laboured under the additional discomfort of being in great trepidation, whilst taking notes, as to

the reliability of the platform on which he was placed, part of which in fact gave way before the meeting ended.

Another reporter, Mr. William Hunt, who attended the meeting on behalf of a provincial newspaper, had his pocket picked whilst making his way to the front of the hustings in the Castle Yard. Mr. Hunt notes as within his recollection that, on the journey back to town with his "copy," the *Times* reporter, James Denison, stole a march on Dickens. They had each a pair of horses, and left Exeter at about the same time. On leaving Honiton, about sixteen miles distant, Denison, who knew more of the neighbourhood and the ways of the inn-keepers—at that time, at any rate—told his postboy to run into the Golden Lion yard by the back way, and this was done. Denison knew that a pair of horses would be ready harnessed in the yard, with the post-boy waiting for a job, and he calculated that by going in at the

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back way he would obtain possession of them before his *confrère* alighted and entered by the front door. In this anticipation Denison was right ; he secured the horses and took the lead.¹

Dickens may have had this election at Exeter in mind when he penned his account of the eventful election at Eatanswill which Mr. Pickwick and his friends attended. Such, at all events, was the opinion of Mr. Thomas Latimer, for many years proprietor and editor of the *Western Times*, who represented his paper at the contest. "It was his shoulder," we are assured, "that Dickens used as a writing desk on the occasion of the meeting in Castle Yard, and he was certainly convinced that Exeter was the origin of Eatanswill."²

¹ *Then and Now ; or, Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, 1887, p. 4. Another version of this incident credits Dickens with outstripping his rival on the road. The latter, it is said, rode quietly along imagining he was in advance instead of in the rear, and only discovered his mistake when he saw the speech in the *Chronicle*. (*Phonetic Journal*, vol. xxix, p. 21, 15 Jan., 1870).

² W. H. K. Wright in *The Dickensian*, vol. viii, p. 328 (1912).

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Much ink has been spilt in the attempt to identify Eatanswill. Some years ago a spirited controversy was waged between the rival partisans of Ipswich and Sudbury, in Suffolk, the latter going to the length of founding an Eatanswill Club and starting an *Eatanswill Gazette* in support of their claim, which rests chiefly on the assumption that Dickens was present, in his capacity as reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, at the parliamentary by-election which took place in the borough on 25th and 26th July, 1834. The Ipswich advocates, on their side, maintain that Dickens was in that town in connection with the general election of 1835, when one of the candidates was Mr. Fitzroy Kelly, the supposed original of Horatio Fizkin, Esq. Mr. Alfred Morrison, the well-known collector and connoisseur, declared that his father, who was also a candidate, "well remembered young Boz being brought into the committee room at the White Horse, having been sent

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down by Sir John Easthope to 'do' the election, report the speeches, etc.'¹ It is not unlikely that Dickens visited both places in the course of his work as a journalist, but an examination of the files of the *Morning Chronicle* does not bear out either claim. We know from Dr. Mackay that "Boz" and Beard usually ran in harness on such occasions, and their progress can be traced with tolerable accuracy in the pages of the *Chronicle*, which indicated the source of its reports of the more important provincial meetings by heading them "From our own Correspondent," "From our own Reporter," or "From our own Reporters." The Sudbury by-election of 1834 seems to have passed unnoticed.

In November, 1835, Dickens and Beard were at Newbury on a further reporting expedition. From the *George* and *Pelican* the former wrote on "Sunday

¹ Percy Fitzgerald in the *Daily News*, 4th April, 1907. Cf. *Bozland*; *Dickens Places and People*, 1895, p. 15.

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morning" to Thomas Fraser¹ at the office of the *Morning Chronicle* as follows:—

" Dear Fraser,—

" In conjunction with the *Herald* we have arranged for a Horse Express from Marlborough to London on Tuesday night, to go the whole distance at the rate of thirteen miles an hour, for six guineas: half has been paid, but to ensure despatch, the remainder is withheld until the boy arrives at the office, when he will produce a paper with a copy of the agreement on one side, and an order for three guineas (signed by myself) on the other. Will you take care that it is duly honoured? The boy from the *Herald* will be in waiting at our office for their copy; and Lyons begs me to remind you most

¹ Thomas Fraser, son of the Laird of Eskadale, had been formerly connected with the *Scotsman* and, in his capacity as reporter for that journal, attended the dinner at which Sir Walter Scott first publicly avowed the authorship of the Waverley novels. Fraser succeeded J. P. Collier as sub-editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, and shortly afterwards was appointed Paris correspondent. (C. Mackay, *Through the Long Day*, vol. i, 1887, p. 55.)

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strongly that it is an indispensable part of our agreement *that he should not be detained one instant.*

“ We go to Bristol to-day, and if we are equally fortunate in laying the chaise-horses, I hope the packet will reach town by seven. As all the papers have arranged to leave Bristol the moment Russell is down, we have determined on adopting the same plan—one of us will go to Marlborough in the chaise with one *Herald* man, and the other remain at Bristol with the second *Herald* man to conclude the account for the next day. The *Times* has ordered a chaise and four the whole distance, so there is every probability of our beating them hollow. From all we hear, we think the *Herald*, relying on the packet reaching town early, intends publishing the report in their first edition. This is, however, of course mere speculation on our part, as we have no direct means of ascertaining their intention.

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“ I think I have now given you all needful information. I have only in conclusion to impress upon you the necessity of having all the composers ready, at a very early hour, for if Russell be down by half-past eight we hope to have his speech in town at six.

“ Believe me (for self and Beard),
very truly yours
“ Charles Dickens.”¹

The occasion of Lord John Russell's speech referred to in this letter was a dinner offered to him at Bristol on Tuesday, 10th November, 1835, and it was to this same function that Dickens alluded in another letter despatched from the Bush Inn, Bristol, which Forster antedates by six months. It was written on a “ Tuesday morning,” on behalf of himself and Beard, and notifies his chief that he expects to forward “ the conclusion of Russell's dinner ” by Cooper's company's coach leaving the Bush at half-past six

¹ James T. Fields, *Yesterdays with Authors*, 1881, p. 232.

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next morning ; and by the first Balls's coach on Thursday morning he would forward the report of the Bath dinner, indorsing the parcel for immediate delivery, with extra rewards for the porter. Beard was to go over to Bath next morning. He himself would come back by the mail from Marlborough ; he had no doubt that if Lord John made a speech of any ordinary dimensions, it could be done by the time Marlborough was reached ; “ and taking into consideration the immense importance of having the addition of saddle-horses from thence, it is, beyond all doubt, worth an effort. . . . I need not say that it will be sharp work and will require two of us ; for we shall both be up the whole of the previous night, and shall have to sit up all night again to get it off in time.” He added that as soon as they had had a little sleep they would return to town as quickly as they could ; but they had, if the express succeeded, to stop at sundry places along

the road to pay money and notify satisfaction.

The first part of the report, headed "Express from Bristol," duly appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of 11th November, and the conclusion, "From our own Reporter," on the following day. In the meantime, Beard had proceeded to Bath according to plan, to report another political dinner given to the Liberal representatives of that city by their constituents on 17th November, and his account was printed in the *Chronicle* of the 19th.

To these flying visits, it has been observed, we owe the delightful Bath and Bristol scenes in *Pickwick*, written a few months later when they were still fresh in the novelist's recollection. It was at the Bush Inn, a famous hostelry for travellers bound to the West of England, no longer in existence, that Mr. Winkle took up his quarters in endeavouring to escape the wrath of the irascible Dowler.

In after years Dickens looked back

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with legitimate satisfaction to the achievements of these strenuous days. "There never was anybody connected with newspapers," he wrote in 1845, "who, in the same space of time, had so much express and post-chaise experience as I. And what gentlemen they were to serve, in such things, at the old *Morning Chronicle*! Great or small, it did not matter. I have had to charge for half-a-dozen breakdowns in half-a-dozen times as many miles. I have had to charge for the damage of a great-coat from the drippings of a blazing wax-candle, in writing through the smallest hours of the night in a swift-flying carriage and pair. I have had to charge for all sorts of breakages fifty times in a journey without question, such being the ordinary results of the pace we went at. I have charged for broken hats, broken luggage, broken chaises, broken harness—everything but a broken head, which is the only thing they would have grumbled to pay for."

CHAPTER VIII

APPRECIATIONS AND REMINISCENCES

Towards the close of 1833, in the midst of his unwearied activities on behalf of the *Mirror of Parliament*, Dickens had penned the first of his "Sketches." It was published in the December number of the old *Monthly Magazine* and was speedily followed by others, the first to bear the familiar signature "Boz" appearing in August, 1834. The decision of the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* to start an evening journal about this time gave the young reporter his opportunity. Invited by the editor, George Hogarth, to contribute to the new venture, Dickens addressed the following

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letter to his future father-in-law on 20th January, 1835 :—

“ My dear Sir,

“ As you have begged me to write an original sketch for the first number of the new evening paper, and as I trust to your kindness to refer my application to the proper quarter, should I be unreasonably or improperly trespassing upon you, I beg to ask whether it is probable that if I commenced a series of articles, written under some attractive title, for the *Evening Chronicle*, its conductors would think I had any claim to *some* additional remuneration (of course, of no great amount) for doing so ?

“ Let me beg of you not to misunderstand my meaning. Whatever the reply may be, I promised you an article, and shall supply it with the utmost readiness, and with an anxious desire to do my best, which I honestly assure you would be the feeling with which I should always

receive any request coming personally from yourself. I merely wish to put it to the proprietors, first, whether a continuation of light papers in the style of my 'Street Sketches' would be considered of use to the new paper; and, secondly, if so, whether they do not think it fair and reasonable that, taking my share of the ordinary reporting business of the *Chronicle* besides, I should receive something for the papers beyond my ordinary salary as a reporter. . . . "

The response to this appeal was a prompt increase of salary from five to seven guineas, and with the appearance of the first number of the *Evening Chronicle*, containing the first of the series of "Sketches of London," a new vista opened out before him. Although he continued to take his share in the work of reporting for some months longer, the growing popularity of the weekly sketches clearly indicated that greater things were



CHARLES DICKENS AT THE AGE OF 23.
(From the miniature by Miss Rose E. Drummond.)

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in store. Already he had gained the esteem of his chiefs, John Black in particular—"my first hearty out-and-out appreciator," Dickens called him—having the highest opinion of his original genius. During the parliamentary recess the reporters were sometimes called upon, when there were no important meetings to attend, to turn their hands to the writing of book reviews or notices of new plays, but Dickens was spared this kind of work as far as possible. "Any fool can pass judgment, more or less just or unjust, on a book or a play," the bluff old Scot is recorded as saying, "but 'Boz' can do better things; he can create works for other people to criticize. Besides, he has never been a great reader of books or plays, and knows but little of them; he has spent his time in studying life. Keep 'Boz' in reserve for great occasions. He will aye be ready for them."¹

¹ Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, 1890, p. 134

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On 31st March, 1836, the first number of *Pickwick* was published, and it soon became clear that a new star of uncommon brilliance had arisen in the literary firmament. The 'prentice hand had mastered all the secrets of his craft. At the close of the session in August of that year Dickens "noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes" for the last time and his labours as a reporter came to an end.

Dr. Charles Mackay, who became assistant sub-editor of the *Morning Chronicle* in the spring of 1835, has left it on record that at that time Dickens was "universally reputed to be the rapidest and most accurate shorthand writer in the Gallery."¹ Another witness to his powers in this respect was James Grant, of the *Morning Advertiser*, who had worked at his side. "A more talented reporter never occupied a seat in the Gallery of either House of Parliament," he wrote. "Literary

¹ *Forty Years' Recollections of Life, Literature and Public Affairs*, 1877, p. 82.

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abilities of a high order with reporting capacity of a superior kind are seldom found in conjunction. They were so in the case of Mr. Dickens in a measure which I venture to say they never were before in any other man since parliamentary reporting was known.”¹

Some of the stories of Dickens’ achievements as a reporter which gained currency border on the incredible, such, for instance, as the statement that he once wrote out from his notes the copy for a column and a half of the *Morning Chronicle* in an hour.² Grant’s comment on this is: “I am sure that neither in conversation nor in any of his private letters to his friends did he ever himself say anything of the kind. I venture to affirm that such a feat of swift penmanship was never accomplished, either by Mr. Dickens or by anyone else.”³

¹ *The Newspaper Press*, vol. i, 1871, p. 298.

² F. Knight Hunt, *The Fourth Estate*, 1850, vol. ii, p. 272.

³ *The Newspaper Press*, vol. i, 1871, p. 301.

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However that may be, Charles Dickens' remarkable capacity as a shorthand writer admits of no dispute. "All his contemporaries in the gallery whom I have ever known—and I have known many," wrote G. A. Sala in his biography of Dickens, "have concurred in stating that he was the quickest, the readiest, the aptest and the most faithful stenographer of his time. He had completely mastered the difficult and ungrateful art of shorthand: a mistress whom you may woo indeed to conquest, but upon whom the door must be locked, and who must be bound in links of iron, lest she run away from you five minutes after she has given you her heart. In his time Charles Dickens must have listened to and taken down the words of the speeches of nearly every public man of the last generation. He reported Brougham's great speech at Edinburgh, after his resignation of the Chancellorship. He may have reported Lord Stanley's famous oration on the

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Irish Church. He must have reported habitually the speeches of Peel and Grey, of Denman, of Lyndhurst, of Ellenborough, of Hume, and Melbourne, and Grote. Twenty years after he left the gallery he retained enough of his ancient craft to teach the art of shorthand very thoroughly and completely to a young brother-in-law, who was entering on the career of journalism."

To an interviewer who questioned him on the subject about 1890, Sala recalled that Dickens "gave instruction in shorthand to one young fellow, a nephew he believed, who used to come regularly to the office of *All the Year Round* in order to receive the lessons."¹ Confirmation of this is found in the biography of Dickens written by his eldest daughter, who says that "he had, with the help of the little book he bought, invented a wonderful system of shorthand writing, which he taught, years and years afterwards, with

¹ *Shorthand Gazette*, vol. i, p. 66 (Jan., 1907).

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great success and immense pleasure to himself, to a young relative."¹

The statement that the system he wrote was Dickens' own invention is, of course, based on a misapprehension, though the modifications he introduced for his own purposes may easily have given rise to such an impression. No provision is made in Gurney's textbook for what is known as "position writing," but Dickens appears to have adopted this device in order to distinguish certain words. For example, he indicated the words "at," "it" and "out" respectively by the symbols  and it is curious to note that these words are represented in exactly the same way in Pitman's system of shorthand to-day.

There is ample evidence that Dickens made use of his stenographic acquirements long after he had ceased to be dependent on them for his daily bread. Sir Henry F. Dickens, K.C., now the

¹ *Charles Dickens, by his Eldest Daughter*, 1911, p. 41

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Common Serjeant of the City of London, one of the judges of the Central Criminal Court, is given as authority for the statement that his father invariably made a shorthand copy of his MSS. and also of important letters and communications.

Copies of two such letters, each consisting of a page of shorthand notes are preserved in the South Kensington Museum. One of them, addressed to his publisher, Bentley, on 14th July, 1837, relates to the publication of *Barnaby Rudge* and *Oliver Twist*. Messrs. Gurney, to whom the letter was submitted for decipherment, remarked that, "although evidently written by an expert, there are a few idiosyncrasies in the shorthand. It does not strictly follow the Gurney system." This is not surprising, for almost every verbatim stenographer is driven to modify the system he employs in accordance with the experience gained by constant practice. The second letter is apparently a copy of one written to

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Bentley on 22nd October, 1838, and also relates to *Oliver Twist*. As late as 18th October, 1844, in committing to the post in Italy the "First Quarter" of *The Chimes*, the novelist observes: "I have kept a copy in shorthand in case of accidents."

So high an opinion of the value of shorthand did Dickens entertain that he taught it to his youngest son, now Sir H. F. Dickens, and the latter still treasures half a dozen leaves from a notebook prepared by his father for the purpose. They comprise the Gurney alphabet and a list of arbitrary characters with their signification. Some fragmentary shorthand notes written on a sheet of notepaper were found in the novelist's writing desk at Gad's Hill after his death. They proved to have been written by Henry F. Dickens, when he was a young man, at his father's suggestion, and much to the disappointment of Mr. W. R. Hughes, who had hoped that they would have

[illegible]

FACSIMILE OF DICKENS' SHORTHAND COPY OF A LETTER
TO BENTLEY, HIS PUBLISHER, IN 1837.
(From the original MS. in the Forster Collection,
South Kensington Museum).

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thrown some light on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, related only to a speech to be delivered at a cricket club gathering.¹

Throughout his life Dickens recommended authors to learn shorthand, which he himself had found so useful in jotting down any incident that impressed him. Mr. John Collins Francis was the recipient of a letter giving him this advice, dated from the office of *All the Year Round*.²

To those practitioners of the stenographic art with whom he chanced to come in contact when his fame was firmly established, Dickens showed himself sympathetic and appreciative. Several of his own speeches were reported by Mr. Thomas Allen Reed, the doyen of Pitmanites, who, like Dickens, took to shorthand writing as a profession before he was 20. Of one of his reports the novelist said, in a letter dated 21st

¹ W. R. Hughes, *A Week's Tramp in Dickens-Land*, 1891, pp. 246-249.

² *Notes and Queries*, ii Ser. v., p. 83 (3 Feb., 1912).

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February, 1858 : “ It is extremely well done, and with great fidelity. If you should have an opportunity of making my approval of it known to the gentleman who took it down, I would beg you to do so.” And a few months later he wrote to Mr. Reed himself : “ Many occupations have combined to prevent my looking over your notes of my observations at the dinner of the Playground Society until to-day. I have now returned them to the Secretary, with an expression of my high satisfaction with their great and rare accuracy. Allow me to convey the same assurance to yourself.”¹

Not many years before his death, presiding at the second annual dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund in May, 1865, when he held, as he put it, a brief for his brothers, Dickens indulged in some reminiscences of his reporting days which may fitly conclude this little book :—

“ I went into the Gallery of the House

¹ *Facsimile Reporting Notes*, ed. E. J. Nankivell, vol. i, p. 11, Jan., 1888.

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of Commons as a parliamentary reporter when I was a boy not eighteen, and I left it—I can hardly believe the inexorable truth—nigh thirty years ago. I have pursued the calling of a reporter under circumstances of which many of my modern successors can form no adequate conception. I have often transcribed for the printer from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising ; writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. . . . I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old Gallery of the old House of Commons ; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we

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used to be huddled together like so many sheep kept in waiting, say, until the Wool-sack might want re-stuffing. Returning home from excited political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been in my time belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken post-boys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, given in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew.

“ I mention these trival things as an assurance to you that I have never forgotten the fascination of that old pursuit. The pleasure that I used to feel in the rapidity and dexterity of its exercise has never faded out of my breast. Whatever little cunning of hand or head I took to it,

or acquired in it, I have so retained that I fully believe I could resume it to-morrow very little the worse for long disuse. To this present year of my life, when I sit in this hall, or where not, hearing a dull speech (the phenomenon does occur), I sometimes beguile the tedium of the moment by mentally following the speaker in the old, old way ; and sometimes, if you can believe me, I even find my hand going to the table-cloth, taking an imaginary note of it all."

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